

How does the Electoral College work?

Number of Electors

The number of electors per state is determined by the number of senators and representatives in each state.

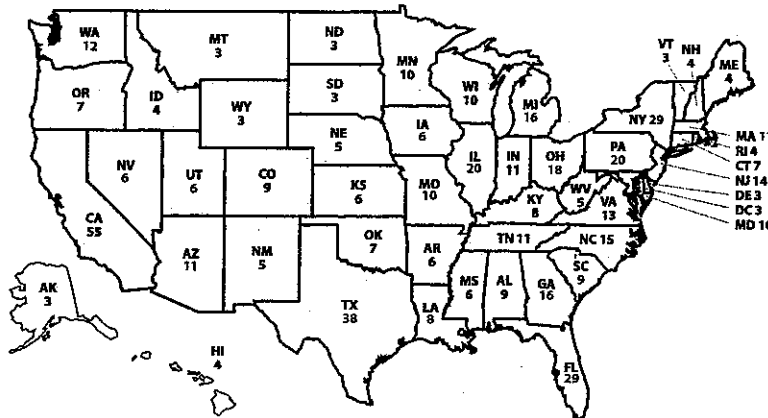
Each state has two senators.

California has a large population, giving it 53 representatives + 2 senators = **55 electoral votes**.

Montana has a small population, giving it 1 representative + 2 senators = **3 electoral votes**.

There are a total of 538 electoral votes from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

A candidate needs 270 electoral votes to win the election.



Winner-takes-all and District systems

All states except Maine and Nebraska count their Electoral votes on a "winner-takes-all" system. When a candidate wins the popular election in a state, he/she takes all the electoral votes for that state. Maine and Nebraska practice the "district" system. In these states, the candidate who wins the popular vote receives two electoral votes. The remaining electoral votes are awarded based on the candidate that receives the most votes in each district.

California Voting Results

Candidate #1 received 52% of the vote

Candidate #2 received 48% of the vote

California's 55 electoral
votes go to Candidate #1

Because of the "winner-takes-all" system in most states, if the voting in the popular election is close, it's possible that one candidate will receive a majority of the popular vote while another candidate receives a majority of the Electoral College votes. This happened in 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000.

Swing States

States that have close numbers of registered voters from the different political parties are known as "swing states." This is because their final vote could swing the election in any direction and it would be too difficult to call an election before all the votes were tallied.